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MERRILLVILLE

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Should We INCORPORATE Or Be ANNEXED?

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Why are certain people in Merrillville spending considerable time, effort and money in an effort to incorporate this area. It is certainly not for monetary gains; there just is none. Is it for political gain? Few, if any, of the prime movers of this project have been active in either political party. Is it an effort to help the businessmen? The Chamber of Commerce has never endorsed incorporation. Most of the businessmen are probably neutral of the subject. Only 2 or 3 of them take part in the Ross Township Consolidated Group meetings.

It can honestly be said this project is entirely the work of individual home owners living in the Merrillville area. We are all proud of our town and wouldn't live elsewhere on a bet. We think our schools are second to none, our homes the pride of Lake County and our neighbors the friendliest and nicest people alive. We are interested in keeping things as they are and not in making changes.

We want an incorporated town for the same reason people have formed towns since the dawn of time. People have been forming towns and cities in essentially the same way since time began. Every civilization, every culture, every race, every continent and every country has self-governing towns and cities. Man has long ago discovered the need for local government. We have resisted the trend longer than most communities our size. We are asking the right to govern our own destiny as we feel best and right for us. We want to stand on our own—indebted to no one.

The leading arguments against incorporation are: (1) Taxes will go up, (2) things are good enough as they are, (3) all politicians are dishonest and incompetent and the less we have to do with them the better, (4) we are getting better services at less cost than neighboring cities.

Taking these in order, I will say this about taxes. As a town, we the citizens will determine exactly what taxes we want to pay. We might just as logically talk of a tax cut. This could be achieved by letting our roads deteriorate, cutting the school budget and in general have the town provide no services whatsoever. This is of course inconceivable. We will pay exactly as much taxes as the services we want cost.

Being a township does not guarantee a low tax rate. Hobart Township, our neighbor to the east, pays $9.28 per hundred; Calumet Township, our neighbor to the west

pays $8.44 per hundred. We pay $6.20 per hundred dollars evaluation. The towns of St. John, Lowell, and Schererville pay $8.74, $7.52 and $8.54 respectively. Gary pays $9.58.

Technically the state might require the installation of sewage disposal plant or some other facility. In actuality there is no practical way for them to put such a requirement into force. Some of the communities in Lake County dump their raw sewage into our rivers and lakes. For some time the state has been trying to get them to stop without much success. When we feel we need or want sewage disposal service we can decide what we want—our own plant, or a tie in with one of our neighboring cities, or some other plan.

It must also be noted that all cities are restricted in both their taxing and bonding powers. All tax rates are approved and passed on by the state. We would never be allowed to assume a debt we could not reasonably be expected to pay off.

Then, as stated previously, no one is interested in making radical changes. Things would most likely go on very much as they are now with some improvements, as will be noted further on.

The second argument that things are good enough now is true if one likes streets full of water, no sidewalks, or curbs, few streetsigns or street lights, no traffic control, inadequate police protection, unpaved streets and a few other inconveniences. True, some areas have a few of these conveniences, but no area in Merrillville presently has all of them or even a majority of them. As a town you could at least decide if you wanted them or not.

Some of us believe that one of the greatest improvements that could be made would be sidewalks. It is inevitable that some day there will be a tragic accident involving children walking to school on the same roads as traveled by high speed automobiles. Then how often are we literally prisoners in our homes because of absence of the family car. Probably the great majority of us have never walked to the store or church when both are only a few blocks away. With sidewalks and a few crossing guards some of the school bus runs might be eliminated, effecting a saving.

As far as politics being a dirty game, such is only the case when citizenry wants it that way, or are too com-

placent to do anything about it. So far Ross Township has had high caliber Trustees and Advisory Board members. There is no reason to suppose our politicians would suddenly become dishonest if Merrillville would incorporate. If this is as nice a place as we claim it to be, there should be no shortage of honest, businesslike office holders. It also seems logical that any major decisions affecting our area could be better solved by local residents, than by three commissioners residing in Gary, Hammond or some equally distant place. Presently we seem to be receiving fair treatment from the county commissioners, but can we always count on impartial treatment from any future board of county commissioners.

To the argument that we are getting better service than our incorporated neighbors, we say it just isn't so. While our Volunteer Fire Department do a monumental task on a shoestring budget, they can not do the same job as Gary's for example. The Sheriffs' department does a very good job with their admittedly limited personnel, but still how many burglars have been apprehended in the past few years? Very few. Merrillville is just exceedingly lucky not to have more crime than it has. I hope this situation continues.

Then also a lot of our services are provided by community clubs and other civic organizations.

Can we always count on volunteer leaders and funds? There is never any guarantee that any project started today will still be going tomorrow. Every year new presidents are elected, new projects are started, and old projects are dropped.

Lastly, and to some the most important, the subject of annexation by Gary. This is a distinct possibility. Now we have no spokesman—no legal advise—no unified front to oppose such a movement. Frankly, Gary needs room for expansion and its officials are committed to a southward expansion. They say most of us depend on Gary for a living and should therefore bear some of its expenses. Even if we should incorporate they could still try to annex us—but we could give them a run for their money and most likely prevent it.

Nothing is being forced on anyone, when the time comes the issue will be decided by a vote of all the people concerned. Can we count on your support.

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